Internal Support by Fire
In the Deliberate Attack

CAPTAIN GLEN M. CONNOR

Too often new platoon leaders come to infantry battalions with the idea that a deliberate attack, or any attack for that matter, will occur as it does in the field manuals. As a result, the platoon assault plan often neglects the overwatch support by fire (SBF), and soldiers assault aggressively but with a minimum of friendly suppressive fire. The reason is that they rarely find the text-book overwatch SBF position that will enable them to suppress the whole objective area.

Every assault must have a detailed plan for internal SBF to provide suppressive fires during actions on the objective. The final result of a good plan will be the continuous suppression of enemy positions and the ability to maneuver against them.

More often than not, the SBF element suppresses the enemy while the platoon gains a foothold and then must shift fires off the objective to avoid fratricide. The missing element is immediate pinpoint suppressive fire while the assault element is moving onto the objective. As the light infantry MTOEs (modified tables of organization and equipment) replace M60 machineguns with M249 machineguns (or squad automatic weapons), support elements in future assaults will have to shift off the objective area even earlier. This earlier shift will be made to avoid fratricide, because the M249 is presently fielded without a tripod or a traversing and elevation mechanism, and its lighter 5.56mm round ricochets more than the M60's 7.62mm round.

Internal fire support provides the necessary pinpoint suppression on the objective and prohibits the enemy from displacing out of the trench or bunker system. It isolates both the bunker or trench leg lying ahead of the assault element and the flanks of the objective during the assault. It allows the clearance teams to concentrate on clearing the trenches and bunkers.

The plan for actions on the objective must account for detailed movement through the entire objective area. The premise mirrors the basic mission of the infantry—"to close with the enemy by fire and maneuver to destroy or capture him, and to repel his assault by fire, close combat, and counterattack." As long as the assault order includes a fire plan and a maneuver plan for each event during actions on the objective, momentum is sustained. Critical events include making the breach, gaining the foothold, knocking out each bunker, and consolidating on the objective.

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Internal support can be achieved by a two-man team, an M249 gunner and a rifleman, taking well-aimed shots. The rifleman provides security for the machinegunner. Both of them must thoroughly understand the assault leader's maneuver plan and also the fire control measures that will be used throughout the assault.

Detailed fire control measures must be planned and rehearsed. These measures must be suited to the current conditions of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time). A few of the tools available to help control fires are chemical lights (including miniature infrared), throwable signaling devices ("Hacky-sacks"), glint tapes, and star clusters.

Whatever techniques and devices are used, observation and control are critical. The soldiers in the internal SBF position must be able to see the trench and enemy positions directly in front of the assault force. They must also be able to take fire commands from the assault element.

As the breach is made, the internal support element is one of the first onto the objective. The assault leader positions his internal support to suppress the bunkers and trench closest to the assault element, as this is the most immediate threat. The company SBF position suppresses the bunkers farthest away from the assault force. As the assault element maneuvers against the bunkers, it clears, secures, and consolidates them. Then members of the

element position their internal SBF to overwatch their flank and, more important, the next bunker and trench the assault force will clear.

The assault leader maintains continual overwatch and suppression of the objective by either bounding the initial SBF position or simply positioning an overwatch element out of the trench line at each critical event. Either way, the objective is seized by a series of bounding actions. The assault force knocks out a bunker, clears it, secures it, and positions an overwatch element that is oriented on the next bunker.

Frequently, the overwatch element has to position itself outside the trench to best exploit fields of fire. It absolutely must be able to see the enemy and put effective fire on him.

The following tactical operation (see sketch) is an example of the principles of internal SBF. It also offers some techniques that have proved successful under the same conditions of METT-T:

The company conducts a deliberate attack on a platoon-size objective. The enemy is dug in with bunkers and connecting trenches. A platoon SBF position provides suppressive fire initially for the breaching effort. It maintains fire superiority while bangalore torpedoes are emplaced at both breach sites. When the bangalores are blown, the SBF element fires on rapid rate for 30 seconds and then shifts fires to bunkers 2, 3, and 4. Finally, it shifts off the objective and provides right-flank security as the assault occurs. The assaulting platoons breach and emplace internal SBF positions A, B, and C. Position A provides pinpoint suppression into Bunkers 1 and 2 and enfilade fire on the interconnecting trench. Position B overwatches the area between the two trenches. It can also support the secondary assault into command and control bunkers 5, 6, and 7. Position C's purpose is to provide pinpoint suppression of bunkers 5, 6, and 7 and the connecting trenches, and to secure the left flank.

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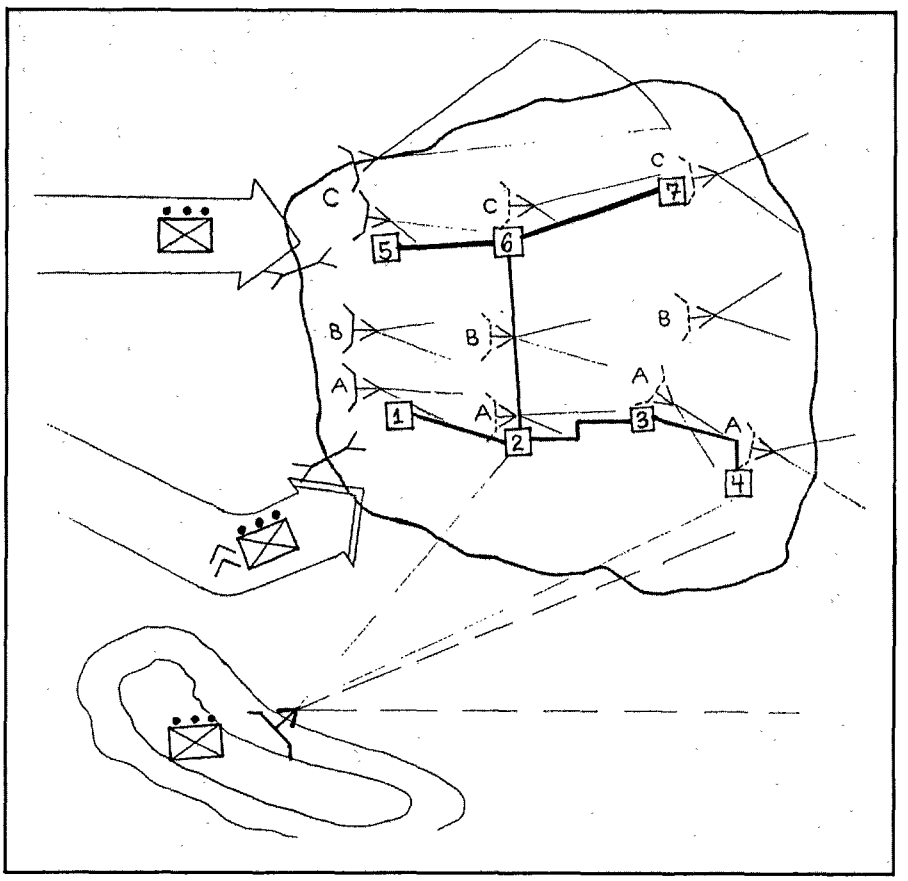


The assault element gains the foothold in bunker 1, clears bunker 2, and prepares to assault 3. Positions A and B conduct bounding overwatch to the point from which both will be able to suppress bunkers 3 and 4 as well as 6 and 7 if needed. At the same time, they conduct initial seizure of the area between the two trenches. An element from C bounds to a point where it can support the assault of bunkers 6 and 7, and the rest of C secures the flank. The end state is that the assault element seizes all bunkers, and the SBF positions provide initial security as the force begins consolidation.

Enemy fires, both direct and indirect, may prohibit movement outside the trenches. In this case, SBF positions must still bound successively down the length of the trench, but soldiers providing subsequent SBF positions move directly with the assault team through the trench. As a bunker or trench leg is seized, an internal SBF team is placed outside the trench to overwatch the next event.

Regardless of the situation or the assault technique, the assault leader increases his chances of success if he adheres to the principles of fire, maneuver, and security. By planning for the movement and control of the internal SBF positions, the assault force maintains fire superiority, initiative, and momentum. It meets the enemy under ideal conditions: with one element dedicated to the continual suppression of the objective and another dedicated to seizing and destroying enemy forces that are occupying the objective.

Without a support-by-fire plan, we may gain the foothold, but the assault could stall as we take casualties from enemy positions that have not been suppressed. In this case we have failed to wrest the initiative from the enemy, and he is still able to displace within the trench. We may see him and we may not as he presses the fight into trench and

fighting positions that we have already cleared. He is able to maneuver into our flanks and rear and we lose all momentum. A good SBF plan can prevent this catastrophic turn of events.

There are two keys to making an internal support-by-fire plan work inside the objective: First, the SBF element must locate where it can best observe the next trench or bunker the assault team will enter, and it must also secure itself. Second, it must be controlled by strict fire control measures during the entire execution of actions on the objective. The assault leader who plans and rehearses these control measures in detail will be able to synchronize his combat power, knock the enemy off balance, and seize and hold the objective.

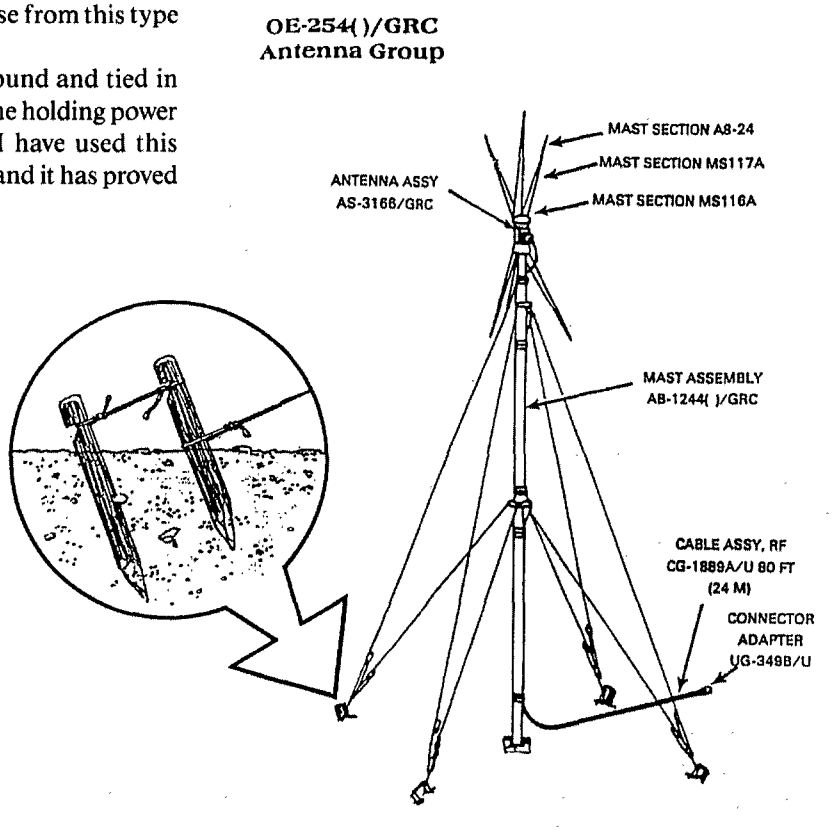
Captain Glenn M. Connor commanded the headquarters and headquarters company and Company A, 4th Battalion, 27th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division. He has also served in the 4th Infantry Division, and as Aide-de-Camp to the Deputy Commanding General, U.S. Army, Pacific. He is a 1986 graduate of the United States Military Academy and is now attending graduate school at the Colorado School of Mines.

SWAP SHOP

STAKING AN ANTENNA ASSEMBLY

Securing an antenna assembly such as the OE-254 on very soft ground or sand can be tricky. Over the past 15 years, I have seen several such assemblies come loose and fall on soldiers. With masts more than 30 feet high, and with the weight of the antenna near the top, it doesn't take much for the support stakes to work loose from this type of ground.

Two stakes driven deeply into the ground and tied in tandem (see insert) can greatly increase the holding power of the stake attached to the support. I have used this method as far back as the Vietnam war, and it has proved 100 percent successful.



(Submitted by Lieutenant Colonel David M. Fiedler, New Jersey Army National Guard, Retired.)